

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

friend ; in such wise that (as she herself secretly and bashfully sometimes confessed to me) oftentimes the Lord and she recited the Psalms, walking up and down in her room, as two religious or clerics are wont to say the office together. O wondrous, marvellous, and unheard of ,in our ages, demonstration of the divine familiarity ! "1

During this time of seclusion, Catherine learned to read, though it does not appear that she attempted to study anything more than the Psalms and the offices of the Church. Fra Raimondo tells us that she had originally got the alphabet from a companion of hers, but found it so hard to get further that, fearing that she was losing time, she prayed to God and was miraculously instructed. When he knew her, she could read any writing, rapidly and with ease, though unlike other people and as if she knew the meaning of the words without being able to spell out the syllables. Reading, however, was not her only recreation. She took great delight in flowers of all kinds, and would weave them into crosses and garlands in her spare time, singing mystical songs of divine praise the while. These she would send or give as presents, either directly or through Fra Tommaso della Fonte, in token of the love of Christ. A young Dominican friar, Tommaso di Antonio Caffarini, soon to be very closely associated with her spiritual life, tells us that, before he knew her, he had received some of these mystical gifts through her confessor.²

At the same time, perhaps inevitably, her ecstasies were growing upon her. After Communion, or at other times when meditating upon the mysteries hidden in God, she would be rapt out of her senses for a while, and her body left rigid and seemingly lifeless, insensible to touch or wound. This increased with years, and lasted all through her life. It is a not unusual feature in the legends of women saints and mystics, nor would it be hard to find a purely natural and scientific explanation.

There are, doubtless, many who will regard this simply as a form of catalepsy, and who will see in much of these visionary

¹ *Legenda*, I. xi. 5, 6 (§ § 109-112).

² *Contistatlo Fr. Thomae Caffarini, Processus*,
col. 1260. 22